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READING FOR DISADVANTAGED
BLACKS: SELECTIVE SURVEY OF LITERATURE
AND IMPLICATIONS

by

Ethel W. Spaight

A RESEARCH PAPER
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This research paper has been
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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Since the latter part of the 1950's, educational problems of the disadvantaged have been widely publicized. Reading, the first skill, has received much attention. The obvious lack of achievement in reading on the part of disadvantaged children moved Mortimer Smith to make five proposals to change the academic achievement of the disadvantaged. These proposals are somewhat general, but can be applied to specific subjects or to the total school curriculum. Smith's proposals are as follows:

1. "My first proposal is that teachers of the disadvantaged stop putting these children in a sociological slot and treating them as special cases and start teaching them as human beings. The techniques of teaching disadvantaged may have to be different than those used in teaching the more fortunate, but the goals are the goals we want for all children.
2. My second proposal, then is that those responsible for big-city schools-or for any schools, for that matter-establish some priorities and decide what is the primary purpose of the schools. . . . Many educators...believe that school must undertake the total education of the child and attempt to meet all his developmental needs.
3. My third proposal would be that the first order of business is to teach them to read.
4. Fourth, I suggest that a herculean effort be made to improve the speech of these disadvantaged youngsters, both the manner and matter of it.

5. My last proposal is that schools for the disadvantaged provide a structured and consistent environment, both in the way the subject matter is taught and in the behavior expected of the children.¹

The writer perceives the third proposal which relates to teaching disadvantaged children to read, as being of prime importance for this paper. The other four would seem to provide the support needed to accomplish the task of teaching them to read.

Smith's writing is one type of writing that has been published in an attempt to disseminate information on improving the academic plight of children in slum schools. Many educators and other concerned individuals have individually or collectively published similar works. Frequently, these writings give a "I feel it in my bones" sensation. It is difficult to find a readable collection of research reports on attempts that have been made to teach the disadvantaged to read. The purpose of this report is to provide just such a collection. It will be devoted primarily to research studies whose subjects were disadvantaged youngsters in grades kindergarten through six. These studies will be selected on the basis of the following criteria.

1. The study must be concerned with teacher behavior and teaching techniques, pupil related variables or materials. Any one or a combination of these categories can appear in a study.

¹ Editorial, The Wall Street Journal, March 11, 1968, p. 14.

2. The study must appear to be sound research. (determined by writer and advisor.)
3. All studies should have been conducted within the last fifteen years.
4. The majority of the subjects in each study should be black children.

From these studies the writer will attempt to identify implications for teaching disadvantaged youngsters with regard to teacher behavior and teaching techniques, materials, and other pupil related variables.

The terms disadvantaged, black children, and slum schools will be used interchangeably in this paper.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this second chapter is to review the research that is related to teaching disadvantaged children to read. This review will help to give some organization to the factual and theoretical issues that pertain to teaching black youngsters to read. For the sake of coherence, the research review will be organized under the headings of, Teacher Behavior and Teaching Techniques, Pupil Related Variables, and Materials and Approaches.

There are a limited number of studies in this review. Perhaps there are other published studies on this topic which the writer did not locate. Despite the limitation of available research, the studies selected for this section do reflect the nature and extent of research concerned with teaching disadvantaged children to read. To provide a more representative view of the available literature on subject, a special section will be included teacher attitudes and curriculum.

Teacher Behavior and Techniques

These studies pertain to the behavior and techniques used by the teacher. It is well established that the teacher's behavior and the techniques

she uses to elicit learning are important factors. Carlton and Moore¹, considering the premise of "how one behaves is determined by the concept he has of himself," conducted a study to test this notion. They specifically wanted to determine if reading achievement of culturally disadvantaged children could be significantly improved by use of classroom self-directive dramatization of stories and if the self-concept would be improved with this technique. They reported that significantly greater gains in reading achievement were made. There was evidence that some positive self-concept changes were made.

Pikulski,² concerned with the effects of reinforcers on word recognition, conducted an experiment to compare results of two types of reinforcers upon the child's ability to recognize a number of words. He used equal numbers of boys and girls from the kindergarten classes of a school attended mostly by blacks. During the learning session some children were given verbal reinforcement and some were given material reinforcement. The results showed that material rewards did not cause the children to perform better. The approval of the examiner did correlate with fewer errors for the girls but, not for the boys.

¹Lessie Carlton, and Robert H. Moore. "The Effects of Self-Directive Dramatization on Reading Achievement and Self-Concept of Culturally Disadvantaged Children," The Reading Teacher, XX (November, 1966) 125-130.

²John Pikulski "Effect of Reinforcement on Word Recognition", The Reading Teacher, XXIII March, 1970, 516-522.

Sylvia Ashton-Warner's techniques for determining and teaching key vocabulary words has been considered by many who teach reading. Packer¹ wanted to determine if key vocabulary words disadvantaged children were asked to learn, differed significantly from the vocabulary introduced in popular pre-primers and primers. Children who were black, Puerto Rican, Indian and of Italian decent were the subjects. The subjects were located in four American cities. Teachers used the Ashton-Warner method of develop key vocabulary lists. These lists were then compared with the key words used in four sets of beginning readers -- (words in such categories as names, fear, sex, animals, etc.). The words asked for by the children had little or no relationship to the words introduced in popular basal readers.

The teacher is a very important variable in a child's learning atmosphere. Chall² and Feldmann explored the kinds of teaching procedures and teacher characteristics found among teachers who were said to use an eclectic basal reader approach. An effort was made to determine how the teacher interpreted the approach, how it was implemented, and whether the differences in implementation affected reading achievement. The evidence indicated that the important teacher-related factors were competence,

¹ Athol B. Packer, "Ashton-Warner's Key Vocabulary for the Disadvantaged" The Reading Teacher, XXIII (March, 1970), 459-564.

² Jeanne Chall, and Shirley Feldmann. "First Grade Reading: An Analysis of the Interactions of Professed Methods, Teacher Implementation and Child Background," The Reading Teacher, XIX (May, 1966), 569-575.

a thinking approach to learning, a sound-symbol emphasis in reading, and using appropriate levels of lessons. Teachers did seem to make a difference in pupil achievement.

Froelich, Blitzter and Greenberg¹ report an experiment that was conducted to answer the question of what constitutes a good beginning reading program for working with disadvantaged children. This experiment took place at a New York City - Harlem school. The school had eleven hundred pupils with a majority of black pupils. The general aim of the program was to provide a careful system of individual pacing of instruction designed to allow each child to be involved according to his developing ability and to build a positive image of himself as a successful learner. Some of the more specific aspects of the program were the following --

1. Oral reading development.
2. A regular testing program that allowed for appropriate level placement.
3. Developing independence in reading and study skills through carefully selected individual activities and individual and continuous record keeping.
4. Frequent contact with the parents through homework and conferences.
5. Careful pacing of low, average, and high achievers.

¹Martha Froelich, Florence Kaiden Blitzter, and Judith W. Greenberg. "Success for Disadvantaged Children," The Reading Teacher, XXI (October, 1967), 24-33.

6. Well planned worksheets designed--pupils could complete sheets independently and correct them.
7. Individual conferences were held several times each week to check on word recognition.

Pupil Related Variables

Many variables are presented to influence any child's reading. These variables for the average American child are fairly well defined and researched. For the disadvantaged black child some variables have been researched. Aliotti¹ conducted a study to determine how accurately disadvantaged first grade children read pictures. A picture interpretation test was developed for children in kindergarten through sixth grade. The picture test was based on drawings used in the Verbal form B of the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking Ability. The child was shown a picture and asked to give a yes or no answer to the question asked by the examiner. Such questions as - Is the girl carrying a pot? And, is the boy carrying a rabbit? The subjects were white middle-class children and black disadvantaged from schools in Georgia. When compared to the white middle class, the blacks showed statistically significant perceptual impairment. This was somewhat of a cultural literacy examination.

Fort, Watts, and Lesser² studied young elementary-school children to ascertain if there were any observable patterns of abilities

¹Nicholas C. Aliotti, "Ability to Read A Picture in Disadvantaged First Grade Children," The Reading Teacher, XXXIX (October, 1970) 3-6.

²Jane G. Fort, Jean C. Watts, and Gerald Lesser, "Cultural Background and Learning in Young Children," Phi Delta Kappan, L (March, 1969)

related to social class and to cultural background. Tests were built and administered to first graders to measure ability in the verbal, reasoning, numerical and space conceptualization abilities. Black children showed their greatest skill to be in the verbal area. Their second highest abilities were in evidence in the areas of reasoning and space conceptualization and they scored least well in the numerical area.

A study was conducted by Worley and Story¹ to determine if there is a relationship of between language facility and socioeconomic status of beginning first graders. It was found that first grade children from impoverished circumstances have a language disadvantage when they enter school.

Cohen and Kornfeld² reported a study that analyzed urban black children's functional vocabularies and compared them to the demands of basal readers. In qualifying the functional vocabulary, the authors maintain that if a child knows the base word then it is assumed that he knows the word with an inflected ending (if child knows "walk" then he knows "walked" even if he did not enunciate the inflected ending). Articulation should not be confused with conceptual vocabulary. The authors maintain that the black children studied were familiar with about seventy-five

¹Stinson E. Worley, and William E. Story, "Socioeconomic Status and Language Facility. "The Reading Teacher, XX (February, 1967), 400-403.

²Allen S. Cohen and Geta S. Kornfeld. "Oral Vocabulary and Beginning Reading in Disadvantaged Black Children, "The Reading Teacher, XXIX (October, 1970), 17-32.

per cent of the vocabulary presented in popular basals.

To study auditory and visual performance of slow readers, Linder and Fillmer¹ chose second grade Southern black boys. The auditory and visual channels were compared by presenting one task necessary in learning to read well--that of sequential recall. The boys selected were below the national average in reading, had 75-95 intelligence quotients and had no severe physical or emotional problems. Three instruments were devised for the study. The task called for sequential recall of 1) eight familiar objects, 2) eight digits, and 3) eight colors. The most important finding of the study is that the auditory channel proved to be distinctly inferior to the visual channel. This particular finding would apply to most poor readers. It is usually best to present auditory words in a meaningful context rather than out of context. Materials that are abundant and meaningful in associations can be remembered longer and more easily than materials which provide none of these.

Materials and Approaches

One of the most thoroughly done research reports on approaches was that conducted by the project known as CRAFT (Comparing Reading Approaches in First-Grade Teaching with Disadvantaged Children). This

¹Ronald Linder and Henry T. Fillmer, "Auditory and Visual Performance of Slow Learners, "The Reading Teacher, XXIV (October, 1970), 17-32.

study, the report written by Harris and Morris,¹ compared two main approaches and four specific methods to discover their effectiveness with disadvantaged urban black children. The two major approaches were the skills-centered approach, and the language-experience approach. The skills centered group was divided in two sections--a basal readers section and a group that used basal readers and the phonovisual method for teaching word attack skills. One section of the language -- experience group used exclusively reading materials developed from the language of children, and the other used the language of the children with a heavy supplementation of audio-visual material. While in the first and second grade, those children in classes using the skills-centered approach had slightly higher means than those using the language experience approach. At the end of the third grade this pattern had reversed, but the difference was not statistically significant. Other results and conclusions outlined by the authors are as follows:

1. In the first CRAFT year it was evident that three of the methods, Basal, Language Experience, and Audio-Visual, provided relatively good results when their distinctive features were given added time.
2. Achievement difference in favor of girls tended to increase during the second and third grades, and were substantial by the end of third grade. The differences favoring girls were largest in the Language Experience and Phonovisual

¹Albert J. Harris and Coleman Morris. "The CRAFT Project: A Final Report," The Reading Teacher, XXII (January, 1969), 335-340.

Methods... This linking of differences in achievement with teaching methods strongly suggests that for this population, the advantage held by the girls is a result of environmental conditions within the school rather than biological differences between the sexes.

3. Kindergarten children had consistently higher scores than non-kindergarten children on the first grade pre tests and on all sets of posttests. Differences were quite small in the first grade, but tended to increase through the third grade.
4. Children who were identified by their teacher as being early readers at the beginning of the first grade surpass the total population on pre-test and on all sets of posttests. By the end of the third grade these children increased their advantage over the other children and scored well above grade norms on all reading tests. The progress of this group suggests that an early start in reading may be beneficial to disadvantaged children who are initially high in readiness tests, or who, in the opinion of their teachers, possess some ability to read.
5. The posttests of the second grade replication showed that children in the Skills-Centered Approach had mean grade scores as the norm in Reading and Word Discrimination, an unusual result with disadvantaged children.
6.efforts to maintain discipline were associated with relatively poor achievement. There was a trend suggesting that emphasizing praise and avoiding scolding is associated with good results in the Language Experience Approach, but not in the Skills-Centered Approach.
7. In the second grade there was a tendency for the Skills-Centered teachers who utilized a wide variety of reading activities to achieve better results than those who did not go beyond the prescribed skills program.
8. A fifth method was added in the replication study. It combined Phonovisual phonics with Language Experience Audio-Visual Method. Teachers did no better than they had done with one of the two components.

Some of the teachers reactions to the experience in this study are as follows:

1. Teachers felt that the Language Experience Approach exclusively lacked structure. They considered structure necessary to teach disadvantaged children. Some of the teachers who participated in the project when last checked were using some component of the Language Experience Approach with the basal reader as a basic tool.
2. Most teachers were using components of both the Language Experience and Skills Centered Approach. -- They felt that no one method is the best to help children read acceptably. It was felt that attempts should be made to identify strengths of a variety of methods.
3. Teachers agreed that one year is not enough time to feel comfortable and secure in using a teaching approach.

An example of a situation in which basal series were analyzed for their difficulty level is the study reported by Whalen.¹ This study compared the difficulty levels of the Bank Street Basal Reading Series and the Harper and Row Basic Reading Program. From each series four books were compared on the basis of 1) number of words, 2) number of different words,

¹Thomas E. Whalen, "A Comparison of Language Factors in Primary Readers", The Reading Teacher, XXIII (March, 1970), 565-570.

3) average sentence length, and average word length. The Bank Street Series was judged to be more difficult.

Robinson¹ conducted a study to determine the reliability of measures related to reading success of average, disadvantaged and kindergarten children. He was specially looking for instruments that would identify visual, auditory, and visual-motor abilities necessary for success in reading. The following instruments were found to have a high level of reliability --

- Metropolitan Readiness Test
- Goodenough Draw-A-Man Scale (culture free)
- Columbia Mental Maturity Scale (individual use)
- Word Discrimination Test

Teacher Attitudes and Curriculum

Social interaction in the classroom is certainly an important variable that influences the child's learning. It focuses on the behaviors and characteristics of the teacher and the learner. An assessment was made of this interaction by Yee.² He was able to isolate some important facets of social interaction that should be considered. It was found that the attitudes of middle class and lower class learners differ very much

¹H. Alan Robinson, "Reliability of Measures Related to Reading Success of Average, Disadvantaged, and Advantaged Kindergarten Children," The Reading Teacher, XX (December, 1966), 203-209.

²Albert H. Yee, "Social Interaction in Classrooms: Implications for the Education of Disadvantaged Pupils," Urban Education, IV (October, 1969), 203-219.

and the teacher's attitude more closely corresponds to that of the middle class child. This amounts to saying that the teacher and the lower class child are not naturally compatible. Compatibility can be achieved by providing the teacher with the tools to understand the child. At this point the writer would like to point out that providing the understanding is often not enough. The writer has personally seen this understanding translated into benevolently awkward attitudes that do as much harm to both teacher and learner as not understanding. It requires a specially sensitive teacher to apply her knowledge of the specifics about disadvantaged children effectively. This is the point where the book has to stop and the teacher must take over. For many teachers it is known as the failing point. The problem of finding adequate teachers is still one of the great magnitude.

Federally funded programs supported efforts to enrich the backgrounds of urban teachers. Larson purports that these "programs have often focused more on efforts to help teachers understand the sociological, economic and psychological conditions surrounding the 'culturally deprived child' than on specific attempts to help them teach. Consequently, some teachers complete additional training experiences without reducing their frustration about how, when and with what resources to teach the content subjects for which they are responsible."¹ Weinstein and Fantini

¹ Richard G. Larson, "School Curriculum and the Urban Disadvantaged: A Historical Review and Some Thoughts About Tomorrow," The Journal of Negro Education, XXXVIII, (Fall, 1969) 354.

seem to agree with Larson in their assertion that "Unfortunately, description about the nature of the disadvantaged learner is more abundant than appropriate instructional prescriptions--the engineering or applied sectors of teaching and learning. The task now is to develop relevant prescriptions that are functionally linked to these descriptions."¹

Kinder² writes about the training and use of paraprofessionals or aides. Around 1966 many aides were hired under a federally funded Title I grant. The qualifications and duties of this nonprofessional group varied according to the individual location. In-service programs is one way to help prepare those without training to effectively perform some of the technical aspects of a teaching situation. It was a great opportunity to provide more concentrated help for disadvantaged pupils. This was true in 1966. In 1967 the writer worked in a building where there was twenty-six aides to serve thirty-two teachers. At the present time this number has been cut to seven to serve the same number of teachers. One factor is evident from observation -- teachers greatly need this help. The cut has been unfortunate for all concerned, especially the children.

Larson³ maintains that the urban curriculum has remained

¹Gerald Weinstein and Mario Fantini, "A Strategy for Developing Relevant Content for Disadvantaged Children" (Project for the Fund for the Advancement of Education, New York, 1967, p. 5. (Mimeographed)

²Robert Farrar Kinder, "The Training and Use of Paraprofessionals in Teaching Reading," in Reading Goals for the Disadvantaged, ed. by J. Allen Figurel (Newark Delaware, International Reading Association, 1970) p. 63-76.

³Larson, "School Curriculum and the Urban Disadvantaged" p. 351.

largely untouched by either current concerns or Federal assistance. Despite staffing innovations, and an abundance of remedial programs, equipment improvements, and compensatory programs, the curriculum is still archaic. He further asserts that such little attention had been given to this area that the 1960 edition of the Encyclopedia of Educational Research had no sections on cultural deprivation, disadvantagement or urban education. By 1958, through a Ford Foundation grant, the Great Cities School Improvement Program was started. This was a program implemented in the fifteen largest cities in the nation to demonstrate use of new materials, additional personnel in new roles, and modified school programs with little research base.

Larson suggests the following guides for improving the urban school curricular. --

1. A comprehensive reading program with skill development taught at any grade level where children need it.
2. Teachers need to be centrally involved in planning, implementing, and maintaining school programs.
3. The community needs to become more active in the development of curriculum.¹

Cohen, in his book Teach Them All To Read, asserts that:

The breakthrough in the teaching of reading to disadvantaged children will come if we concentrate on methodology of teaching,

¹Larson, "School of Curriculum and the Urban Disadvantaged" p. 358-359.

rather than on the causes of the "disadvantaged" condition. This point of view is not popular, but it is the best conclusion that can be drawn from experience with all types of children. For example, to know that Johnnie was dropped on his head at two months of age, that his father does not live at home, that his mother is a prostitute, and that his brother beats him daily does not suggest the most efficient way to teach him to read.¹

The above quotation is typical of the direct approach that Cohen takes in presenting theory, methods, and materials he has had success with in teaching disadvantaged children to read. This book is the most complete source the writer has read.

¹S. Alan Cohen, Teach Them All To Read (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 7.

CHAPTER III

IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this third chapter of this research paper is to present the writer's interpretation of this study. A listing will be made of the implications and conclusions and suggestions for further research will be made. The implications and conclusions of the research presented in this paper are as follows:

1. The teacher is more important than the approach or materials.
2. Teachers need more in-service training in the teaching of reading and colleges should require more extensive training in the teaching of reading.
3. Kindergarten programs should be modified so that they include sequentially planned activities for development of specific aspects of reading readiness.
4. Pupils who show advanced readiness for kindergarten may benefit from an earlier start in reading.
5. When choosing a basal reading series, careful consideration would be given to all aspects of the reader. Companies often place pictures of black children in these books as a major selling point. Other than the pictures in the readers,

they would be considered inadequate for any population.

6. The use of the child's own language experiences bring about more involvement on the part of the child.
7. A well organized program that has a definite scope and sequence and is carried out by all teachers is an avenue to greater progress for each disadvantaged youngster. Integral parts of this program should include language development, provision for variation in both levels and rates of learning, frequent evaluations, and intensive pupil, teacher and parent involvement.

Suggestions for Further Research

After searching through many journals and books for research on teaching disadvantaged children to read in the first six grades, the writer feels that there is a tremendous gap in the area. The first six grades provide the foundation for a child's further education. If the problem of teaching reading to black youngsters is going to be attacked, more organized research should be done on all aspects of teaching reading to younger children. The following are two areas where great effort should be concentrated.

1. Efforts should be made to identify teacher related variables that contribute to success in reading. The teacher variable needs to be manipulated rather than the child.
2. Efforts should be made to determine which instructional components of several approaches are best suited in

teaching reading to the disadvantaged.

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